

Transcript: Body Scan

Health Care Provider:

This is a guided body scan exercise. For the duration of this exercise, we will practice focusing our attention on various physical sensations in different parts of our bodies. We often have sensations of which we aren't aware. Sometimes these sensations are signs of emotional distress and, by practicing paying more attention to these sensations, we may become more aware of the physical side of our emotions. It is helpful to see the link between emotions and physical sensations. This exercise offers the additional benefit of suspending our judgment and our effort to make the sensations go away. So, when harmless, yet uncomfortable, physical sensations arise related to anxiety, frustration, fear, sadness, or anger, we can improve our ability to accept these sensations and not be overcome by them.

To begin this exercise, make sure that you are in a comfortable position. Sitting upright is preferred to reduce drowsiness. However, this exercise can also be helpful for falling asleep; so if you are using it for that purpose, you can do it lying down. For those sitting, if possible, have your feet flat on the ground. See if you can sit up straight. Have your back be firm, but flexible. Rest your hands in your lap in a comfortable way. If you're willing and able to close your eyes, gently do so. Otherwise, rest your gaze on something in front of you, maybe a spot on the ground or a nearby surface. Relax the muscles around your eyes.

Take a few breaths that are a bit deeper and slower than usual. See if you can feel the air coming in your nose, into your lungs, down into your belly and then back out of your nose. Breathe in... and out.... You should notice your abdomen rising and falling with each breath.

At any point in this exercise, if you, due to injury or loss of limb, cannot feel any sensations in certain areas, feel free to explore sensations in other areas of your body or your breath until you can join the exercise again. Begin by noticing the bottoms of your feet from the front, back and sides. Notice what it feels like, the pressure and the contact between your feet and the ground. There may be tingling, tightness, vibration, pressure, or variations in temperature. From there, move around to the tops of your feet and explore that area of your body, again noticing whatever sensations arise.

Then move up from the tops of your feet to your ankles. Feel all around your ankle and notice the sensations. At some point you may notice pain in parts of your body. Bring your attention to that pain and explore it more fully. Where does it start, and where does it stop? Where is it most intense, and where is it least intense? Is it shallow, deep, or both? Is it constant or changing? If pain arises, see if you can explore it, without needing to change it.

From your ankles, move up to your calves. Then move to the front of your legs, to your shins. Can you notice anything in your lower legs? Any sensations, potentially, contact with your clothing, or tightness, or tingling? Move from your calves to your knees, noticing the bend in your leg at the knees. Examine the front and the back and the sides of your knees.

From there move up to your upper legs. The front of your upper legs, which may have contact with your hands or arms. And the back of your upper legs, which may have contact with your chair or other surface you're on. Explore the sensations of that contact. Where does it start? Where does it stop? Is there pressure, or tingling, or temperature? From there move up through your hips, noticing the bend in this area of your body if you're sitting. Explore this area, and then move up to your lower back. It is possible there is some stiffness or pain here – see if, just for now, you can allow it to be as it is. Noticing and exploring any sensations of pain or other sensations you experience.

Then move to your abdomen. You may be able to feel your abdomen rise and fall with each breath. See if you can notice anything else there. And from there move up to your midback, potentially making contact with the chair or bed. Noticing where the contact starts and where it stops. From there move to your upper back. And your chest. Noticing any rising and falling. And then move up to the front of your shoulders. The top and the back of your shoulders. The sides of your shoulders. At any point during this exercise, your mind may begin to wander. When you notice that wandering, see if you can bring your attention back to the exercise.

From your shoulders move down to your upper arms. Explore all around your upper arms; and then move down into your elbows, noticing the bend in that area of your arm. Your forearms, possibly making contact with your legs or with armrests. Your wrists. The palms of your hands. Front of your fingers. And the tips of your fingers. Notice the sensation here, tingling, vibration, pressure, or contact with other things. And then from there move to the backs of your fingers, the backs of your hands, and then taking a path up your wrists, lower arms, elbows, upper arms, shoulders and then into your neck. See what sensation you can notice in the front of your neck. The back of your neck. Often the back of your neck or upper shoulders will have some tension. See and notice if you have any tension there.

Move up from your neck to your lower jaw, another place where we often hold tension. Explore sensations in your lips, your teeth, and the inside of your mouth. Your upper jaw. Your nose as your breath comes in and out of your nose. Your cheeks. And your ears. Your eyes and the area around your eyes. Your forehead. The sides of your head. The back of your head. The back of your head. And the top of your head.

And now that we have moved from the bottoms of your feet to the top of your head, see if you can take a few minutes and try to hold your whole body in your awareness, noticing all the sensations we explored and any others that you notice.

If your mind starts to wander, gently bring it back to explore the different physical sensations around your body.

Now, as we begin to come to a close for this exercise, see if you can remember what the surrounding area looked like before you closed your eyes. When you're ready, you can slowly blink, and open your eyes. Feel free to move your fingers hands, toes, and feet. Stretch your body. This is a great way to take care of yourself by learning how to be more aware of your

physical sensations, accepting those sensations, and staying in the present moment. As you go through your day, look for more opportunities to practice those skills.